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ABSTRACT

Developing individuals who can think and read critically when confronted by the language of commercial and political persuaders is an important goal of reading instruction and of education in general. To make students capable of dealing with the omnipresent propaganda of the modern world, teachers themselves must have a functional concept of critical reading. A model of the critical reading process for use by elementary and secondary school teachers consists of five interdependent phases: (1) awareness of the denotations and connotations of words, (2) suspension of judgment, (3) interpretation, (4) problem solving, and (5) insight. Associative exercises--the study of poetry, analysis of advertisements--and other activities can help elementary and secondary school students understand the emotional power of connotation. Exercises stressing the importance of context, lessons on subliminal advertising, and fables are just some of the techniques that can be used to teach students to suspend judgment. Teachers can use an intensify/downplay pattern of questions to sharpen students' interpretive skills. Both elementary and secondary school students can apply the scientific method to problem solving. When readers understand both themselves and the true nature of a situation, they have reached the last phase of critical reading, insight. (JL)

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CRITICAL READING THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

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CRITICAL READING THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

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The development of individuals who think and read critically is an important goal of reading instruction and of education in general. A statement of the Educational Policies Commission asserts that the primary purpose of education is to produce "a rational thinking individual, who has developed both critical and creative thinking, and who uses those intellectual abilities in becoming a useful and productive member of society." (1) Also, concerned with the critical awareness of sophisticated media by elementary, secondary, and college students, the National Council of Teachers of English resolved to encourage teacher education programs that promote the understandings and insights students need to evaluate critically "the persuasive techniques found in political statements, advertising, entertainment, and news." (2)

Since students today are assaulted by propaganda unequaled even by the Nazi Germany propaganda machines, instruction in critical reading/thinking is essential in helping them analyze the language of the commercial and political persuaders. By the time children enter school at the age of five or six, they have viewed thousands of commercials; by the age of sixteen, they have watched over

640,000 commercials. (3) In order to become intelligent and articulate citizens, training is required in the new media literacy.

The Federal Trade Commission Staff Report containing the petition for the regulation of television advertising of candy and other sugared products to children, discusses the imbalance between the mechanisms of the persuaders and the resources of the persuadees. (4) On the one hand, the commercial advertisers, representing a multibillion dollar industry, have sophisticated personnel with well-financed scriptwriters, actors, technicians, psychological analysts, and motivational researchers. On the other hand, there is the uninformed citizen or naive, gullible child. According to Feinbloom: "An advertisement to a child has the quality of an order, not a suggestion." (5) For some preschool children, those characters inside the television set are real, speaking to them. It is difficult for young children to separate reality from fantasy. Even teenagers tend to accept the claims of advertisers except when personal experiences influence them otherwise, according to a study by Linn and associates at the University of California, Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science. (6) Commenting on the effect of advertisements on teenagers, Linn said: "Advertisers, it appears, succeed in defeating critical analysis of their potentially misleading messages." (7) The adolescents of the study were aware of the persuasive

appeal and intent of the advertisers, but they apparently did not know how to deal with it. Therefore, as well as training the future persuaders through marketing and psychological curricula, instructors need to train the future persuadees of our country in the critical analysis of propaganda techniques and language manipulation by writer or speaker.

In order to facilitate the critical awareness of persuasive techniques by students, teachers require a functional concept of critical reading. The literature abounds with varied definitions of critical reading, which, for the most part, are listings of skills or component abilities (8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13). In her analysis of research on critical reading/thinking, Griffin (14) concluded that the varied listings of skills involved in critical reading tended to support the definition of critical thinking constructed by Ennis as the accurate assessment of statements based on the knowledge of methods of inquiry and logical reasoning. (15) Therefore, critical reading is critical thinking. This view, which is maintained in this paper, has been emphasized by Russell (16) and is incorporated in Ennis' (17) comprehensive critical reading model, that was adapted by Hash (18) to guides presenting dialogues in narrative form on critical issues.

In consideration of the varied and numerous listings in the literature of skills involved in critical reading and until more factorial and empirical studies are made, the writer submits a tentative working model of the critical reading

process for the use of elementary and secondary teachers. The model encompasses the following five phases:

1. Awareness of the denotations and connotations of words.
2. Suspension of judgment
3. Interpretation
4. Problem solving
5. Insight

The phases of the critical reading process are interdependent as the reader uses a cluster of abilities in interpreting a communication; in problem solving all the phases of the critical reading process are utilized. As well as the cognitive and affective abilities inherent in the process, the context of the situation is taken into consideration in analyzing persuasive language.

The five phases of the functional critical reading model are described below as well as suggested instructional procedures for elementary and secondary teachers.

Phase 1. Awareness of the Denotations and Connotations of Words

It is essential for students to distinguish between denotations (explicit meanings) and connotations (suggested meanings) in order for them to understand what the author or speaker means and what he or she wants to suggest. The surface meaning may be quite different from the deeper, implied meaning. Sensitivity to the connotative power of words makes

students aware of the effect of words on their imaginations, feelings, and thoughts. Words have the power to exalt spirits, strengthen feelings of honor, courage, nobility, pride or sympathy, but words may also evoke feelings of intolerance, vanity, fear, jealousy, and suspicion of the new or different.

Teachers can help elementary and secondary students become aware of the emotion producing power of words and analyze words for their connotative overtones through the following activities:

1. Students are presented a concrete object, such as a shoe or a glove, and asked to define the object. The teacher then appeals to the senses by asking for words that suggest how the object feels, smells, looks, sounds, and tastes. These associative words are incorporated into language experience stories. Students compare the literal and associate meanings. Positive and negative attributes are suggested by students for the object, and comparisons made of the effect of the words on the individual.
2. Poetry, which employs symbolism, imagery, and analogy is used to show the skillful use of connotation. Students compare the literal meaning of tiger with the suggestiveness in Blake's "The Tiger." Students give also the literal interpretation of lines of poetry, such as the first line of Frost's poem, "The Fog," and become aware of the poet's selection of words to connote certain effects:

The fog comes on little cat feet.	The condensed water vapor comes on little lower extremities of the Felis catus.

3. Students tell which words they would rather use to describe themselves:

   cautious/cowardly
   touchy/sensitive
   coy/modest
   hypocritical/tactful
   teenager/adolescent/youth/juvenile/kid
   accelerated student/gifted student/"honor" student

4. Students analyze the connotative qualities of current brand names, book titles, song titles, names of restaurants, and names of characters in books.

5. Students identify the emotionally-laden words in newspaper articles and analyze the motives of the writers in using the words. Students rewrite the articles from other points of view.

6. Students identify and analyze words they believe were used by the writers of advertisements as suggested by Altick. (19)

   Example: YOU ARE WHAT YOU (EAT, WHEAT, CONSUME, SWALLOW).

   Add the (excellence, value, goodness, price) of Kretschmer Wheat Germ to any food you (eat, wheat, consume, swallow). It's the heart of the wheat, (of course, naturally, necessarily, consequently) packed with (power, force, energy, strength) and protein, iron, zinc, vitamin E and most B vitamins. (Join, Add, Attach, Tag) it to your diet. (Affix, Add, Unite, Annex) it to your life.

Students discuss the reasons for their selections and whether they felt the rejected words might be more effective.

Phase 2. Suspension of Judgment

Realizing the emotion producing power of words, the student at the second phase of the critical reading process reflects in a rational manner rather than reacting impulsively. This "caveat emptor" phase is concerned with the suspension of judgment until the evidence is considered. The reader has a questioning attitude, resisting efforts that are being made to influence his or her thinking and behavior. (20) This phase implies that the reader may change his or her beliefs "but not by accepting totally an author's viewpoint." (21) The reader is able to live with uncertainty, reinforcing or revising ideas as new information is acquired.

Although a difficult task to accomplish, teachers can attempt to encourage elementary and secondary students to suspend judgment regarding persuasive language by the following techniques:

1. Students consider the context of the situation in which the communication takes place. Students consider who is saying what to whom, under what circumstances, for what purpose and with what result. Students realize that language manipulation may be good or bad depending upon the motives of

the speaker and the context of the situation. Students compare the euphemisms used during the Vietnam War, such as "accidental delivery of ordnance equipment" for shelling your own troops or "an aerodynamic personnel accelerator" for a parachute, with such euphemisms as are expressed to show sympathy or to avoid embarrassing or hurting another person's feelings. (22)

2. Students are alerted to sublimal or indirect advertising in the mass media. Teachers present examples of sublimal embeds as suggested by Lombard (23) who stressed that advertising analysis be a part of the elementary curriculum so that students can become sensitized to nonverbal influences on their attitudes and behavior.
3. Fables are used to show situations encountered by animals that are analogous to the dilemmas of people in television commercials. (24) In La Fontaine's fable, "The Crow and the Fox," the crafty fox as the seducer flatters the naive and gullible crow into opening his beak to sing, thereby dropping the cheese to the ground for the greedy fox. Viewers of television commercials can be misled, as was the crow, by the artful phrases of advertisers that flatter and goad consumers to buy their products. Aesop's fables and other examples from children's literature

are used to help students understand propaganda techniques.

4. Students role play sales situations where high pressure tactics are used and situations that are "low key" in sales technique. In playing the different roles, students identify with the customer, the salesperson, and the employer. Cartoons are drawn summarizing the situations depicted.
5. Tours of television studios are arranged. In this way, students become aware of the ways television commercials are designed, produced, and financed.
6. Since students are exposed to immediate or simplistic solutions to problems through television, magazine, and newspaper advertisements, opportunities are presented for students to study problems in a scientific way with sustained attention, effort, and patience. Linn observed that, in the interest of expediency, adolescents tend to forsake thoroughness and thoughtfulness and, in the realm of advertising, "appear to make decisions based on limited information when given the opportunity to gather evidence for a decision." (25) McCracken (26) described a year-long study of semantics in which secondary students examined the language pollution in their environment, including lectures, college applications, the language of Watergate, book reviews, local newspaper editorials, advertisements,

and televised political speeches. The instructor believed that this sutained year-long study was more effective than short, hurry-up units on semantics.

Phasae 3. Interpretation

After the phase of suspending judgment, the reader needs further clarification of the meaning of the ideas evoked by the words. The individual reads between and beyond the lines, making hypotheses, drawing inferences and generalizations.

The teacher's ability to ask questions that elicit interpretive responses is of value at this phase. Also, students are encouraged to generate their own questions that guide their thinking before, during, and after reading. Studies by Cohen (27) and Andre and Anderson (28) have shown that a question-producing set in students can lead to improved comprehension.

A pattern for questioning used to analyze communication, persuasion, and propaganda is Rank's (29) intensify and down-play schema. This pattern emphasizes the intensification of language through repetition, association, and composition and the down-playing of language through omission, diversion, and confusion. Rank substituted the new schema for the older Institute of Propaganda list of seven techniques, which he did not believe was appropriate for contemporary propaganda; the new pattern is applied to verbal and nonverbal communication, spoken and written, and other symbolic language. Questions

related to the different aspects of the Rank schema are given below:

INTENSIFY	DOWNPLAY
Repetition	**Omission**
What words, slogans, symbols, names, colors, and tunes are repeated? What patterns of repetition do you observe? What reasons can you suggest for these repetitions?	What facts are omitted? Why were these facts omitted, in your opinion? What euphemisms are used to downplay the unpleasant? Why do you think these euphemisms were used?
Association	**Diversion**
With what subject matter is the appeal associated? -tribal pride -ideals -heroes -experts -folk sayings -most people -progress -sensual pleasures What nonverbal associative techniques are used? -visual settings -musical accompaniment To what audience is the appeal directed?	What tactics are used to draw attention away from the significant issues? -emphasizing the nonrelated -employing emotional attacks or appeals -using humor or entertainment -using tactics that drain the energy of others
	Confusion
	What tactics are used to confuse thinking? -using faulty logic -shifting definitions -using equivocations -employing circumlocution -manifesting contradictions and inconsistencies -using unintelligible jargon
Composition	
What nonverbal patterning is employed? -visual (color, size, shape) -aural (music) -mathematical (quantities, relationships) -temporal (pacing) -spatial (spacing, distancing) -patterns of pitch, stress, and juncture	

Composition (continued)

-facial expressions
-body movements
What verbal patterning is used?
-choice of words that intensify
-connotations and denotations
-use of punctuation to intensify
-use of unusual patterns to intensify

The Rank schema is also appropriate for editorials and other persuasive discourse to help students analyze emotional appeals, associative techniques, tactics of omission, and other ways of manipulating verbal and nonverbal communication.

Phase 4. Problem Solving

Problem solving is the search for truth; it involves critical reading/thinking or the accurate assessment of statements based on two criteria: (1) the scientific method and (2) standards of logic. (30)

The components of the scientific method of identifying a problem, making hypotheses, gathering data, analyzing and interpreting data, generalizing, verifying generalizations, and reporting the results require critical reading of a more complex order. The application of the scientific method to commercial propaganda is demonstrated by two studies, one at the elementary and the other at the secondary level.

Wright and Laminack (31) describe a first grade program in which the children listened to commercials, tested products, recorded claims and test results, and also made their own

brand of liquid detergent, which they named Everysoap. Their advertisement for this product read:

New Everysoap

> New Everysoap is different colors. Everysoap will make your hands softer and prettier. It will get your dishes cleaner. New Everysoap makes long lasting bubbles. It's new! Try some today! (32)

All the first graders had the experience of washing their hands with the new Everysoap. In this way, they tested the claims of the commercial. Some children considered the claims as valid; others said they did not experience any difference between the new Everysoap and the soap they were accustomed to using. The teacher observed that the children were better able to distinguish whether the advertiser's claims were facts or opinions as a result of product testing.

Reeves (33) described projects undertaken by his high school students who subjected testable advertised claims to experimental verification by testing the claim, making observations, drawing conclusions, reporting the results of the experiments to the class, and writing letters to manufacturers and the ad agencies stating the results of their tests and asking for responses. A few examples of the claims tested included the claim of Ivory Liquid that it is so rich and thick, "it even whips," the claim that "there are 106 chunks of beef in every can" of Dennison's Chili, the claim that zip-coded mail arrives faster than regular mail, and the ketchup claim, "comes out slowest." About 80 percent of

the advertisements tested were found to be as advertised, 15 percent were "somewhat misleading," and about 5 percent turned out to be "not as advertised." As a result of the experiments, Reeves stated that the attitudes of the students toward business and advertising tended to be more favorable.

As well as using empirical methods, advertisements are analyzed logically for the validity and soundness of their reasoning. The tool of logic is the syllogism or sequence of assumptions and conclusions. In analyzing selected ads, students formulate syllogisms:

> Bothered with gasid indigestion? Make this simple test and prove to yourself that Alkaheist is the best antacid you can buy. Drop a single handy Alkaheist tablet in a glass of water. See how quickly it dissolves? It gets to work fast, fast, fast in your stomach -- faster than any other tablet! Get Alkaheist today!
>
> Major premise: The tablet that dissolves faster relieves acidity better.
>
> Minor premise: Alkaheist dissolves faster.
>
> Conclusion: Therefore, Alkaheist relieves acidity better.
>
> (34)

Since the major premise cannot be accepted as true, the derived conclusion is considered unsound, and the rationality of the advertisement is questionable.

The sweeping deductions of characters in crime dramas on television and in detective and adventure stories are examined by students for the soundness of their statements. For example, the lack of qualifiers is evidenced frequently in

Sherlock Holmes' confident deductions.

Students are encouraged also to identify and study in a scientific and logical way the vital problems of current interest related to environmental damage, the international arms race, the growing population, traffic and urban congestion, crime, health, unemployment, and other issues of concern. In this way, tentative hypotheses and alternative solutions are considered. The critical reader through problem solving exercises reflective and evaluative thinking, weighing carefully the evidence on solutions.

Phase 5. Insight

Insight is defined in two ways: (1) as "reasonable understanding and evaluation of one's own mental process, reactions, abilities;" (35) and (2) as "the capacity to discern the true nature of a situation." (36) Combining these two views of insight is the task of the critical reader at this last phase. The individual has achieved insight in perceiving himself or herself as a discerning reader who criticizes systematically and independently his or her reasoning processes, attitudes, and behavior in response to patterns of persuasive language, abiding by standards of objectivity and impartiality. The reader who has achieved insight has a critical attitude or a critical spirit (37) reflected in the predisposition to ask questions, to search for sound reasons, and to make independent judgments. This

last phase is the culmination of the critical reading program reflected in the ongoing process by the insightful reader of acquiring internal monitoring criteria for making discriminating responses. (38)

An attempt has been made to describe a functional concept of critical reading which can be used, modified or expanded by elementary and secondary teachers to inculcate in the young the survival skills of a critical attitude, the ability to analyze persuasive techniques, and the capacity to evaluate the motives and the language of author and speaker.

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